



Project Vote is the leading technical assistance and direct service provider to the voter engagement and civic participation community. Since its founding in 1982, Project Vote has provided professional training, management, evaluation and technical services on a broad continuum of key issues related to voter engagement and voter participation activities in low-income and minority communities.

ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL POLLWORKER TRAINING PROGRAM

Pollworkers are the link between election administration—the laws, rules and procedures that govern the election process—and the voters. They are the line staff of the democratic process. This makes pollworker training one of the most important components of a fair and effective election system.

Properly trained pollworkers understand the laws and procedures for voting in their state, exercise discretion responsibly, seek guidance when appropriate, and act in a professional and respectful manner with all voters. Poorly trained pollworkers, on the other hand, are not well acquainted with their state's laws and procedures for voting, exercise discretion arbitrarily and treat some voters with considerably more deference than other voters. The differences can lead to illegally disenfranchised voters, unwanted media attention and legal challenges.

This policy brief outlines a few critical elements of an effective pollworker training program.

General Considerations

Statewide Uniformity

Requiring statewide uniformity in pollworker training is critically important. It not only has the advantage of saving money, since each local jurisdiction will no longer devote time and money to creating or updating its own program, but it will also help ensure a near-uniform experience for voters across the state as they go to cast their ballots. The uniformity of experience is an important part of equity and fairness in the election system. In descriptions of four states that follow, three require local jurisdiction adoption of state training (Iowa, North Carolina and Wisconsin), and one (Missouri) does not.

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Elements of a Successful Pollworker Training Program

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Statewide pollworker training is a responsible alternative because the rules and procedures for conducting an election are mostly identical between local jurisdictions within a state. The primary, if not exclusive difference of substance would be the equipment through which voters cast their ballots. The equipment portion of a training program, or any other topic with local variation, can be addressed in a separate module tailored to each jurisdiction's needs. Quality training, developed at the state level, allows for greater use of technology.¹

Collaborating with Local Elections Officials

Local elections officials have developed much useful training information over the years, and often they emphasize different elements. Input from local elections officials into the development of a statewide, uniform training will improve the content and ensure that most elements are included.

Community Input

When developing a pollworker training program, election officials may find it helpful to consult inclusively with representatives of different voting constituencies, especially any that have been historically marginalized, e.g. disabilities, literacy-challenged, etc. Officials may also want to consult with the election system's "constituency," including organizations and political parties conducting voter registration drives. Some minority communities, for example, might want to know whether pollworkers receive diversity training while others might be interested in helping design procedures for interacting with non-English speaking voters. Political parties may be particularly interested in how pollworkers are trained to handle challenges to voters' eligibility.

Training Methods

Election officials should take into account at least two factors when selecting training methods: pollworkers' diversity and pollworkers' need to refer to materials after formal training. People from all parts of the community should be able to serve as pollworkers, including those who are old, young, without advanced levels of education and with disabilities. Materials therefore should be developed that not only reflect different styles of learning but also that recognize pollworkers' varying skills and competencies.

These materials should be designed in a way that encourages later review outside the classroom. For example, election officials may send pollworkers home with a DVD or video that incorporates all of the critical training material and

allows them to review how the voting equipment operates or that demonstrates how to handle a voter challenge. The training could also be posted on state and county websites, from Iowa's example above.

Specific Content Recommendations

Re-Directing Voters to the Proper Polling Location

Pollworkers must be trained to ensure that each voter who arrives at a polling place is at the correct location and so her ballot will count. If the voter is NOT at the correct polling place, the pollworker must direct the voter to her correct polling place. Only if election officials cannot determine the voter's correct polling place, or if the voter chooses to vote at the current location, should the voter be provided a provisional ballot. Providing polling places with a comprehensive list of all registered voters in the jurisdiction, rather than just the voters assigned to any specific polling location, greatly facilitates directing a voter to her correct polling place.

Provisional Ballots²

Provisional voting is the fail-safe method for any person to vote if her name is not in the poll book. Once pollworkers determine that a person is at the correct polling location, or at least at a location where an eligible person's provisional ballot WILL count, the pollworker should provide the voter with a provisional ballot. All persons who are not in the poll book but affirm that they are registered to vote and in the proper location must be provided a provisional ballot.

Some categories of voters may be "flagged" in the poll book and required to show ID before voting. This is often the case for first-time voters who registered by mail but have not yet had their identifies verified. If people who are flagged in the poll book arrive to vote without the proper ID and so vote provisionally, pollworkers must be trained to instruct voters as to what they must do to have their ballots counted. In some states, for example, voters must return with ID before the polls close while other states allow ID up to the certification of the election.

A Second Ballot to Replace A Spoiled First Ballot

If a state uses any paper ballots, the voter has the right to get a second ballot if the voter has somehow erred on the first ballot. Pollworkers need to be trained to administer this process.

ID at the Polls

If ID is required of any voters on Election Day, there must be clear direction for pollworkers with respect to the circumstances



in which it is needed and what forms are acceptable. If the person does not have the proper ID with her, pollworkers must be able to clearly explain the voter's options.

Diversity Training

Voting can be a frustrating or intimidating experience for some categories of voters. This is sometimes the case for voters with disabilities or from communities that have historically experienced discrimination or bias in the administration of elections. For example, people of color and people who are less-than-fluent in English can be intimidated when asked for ID or when required to vote provisionally.

Training should prepare pollworkers for this reality by, among other things, educating pollworkers about various communities' experience with voting. Training should include examples of which parts of the voting process are more conflict-prone and then trained on how best to resolve specific scenarios that tend to arise. Role playing techniques during training are a valuable and non-threatening way to offer sensitivity training.

Using New Machines

Pollworkers must be very familiar with the voting equipment, including the challenges different types of voters may experience with it. A pollworker's knowledge should include not only how to operate the machines themselves but also how to clearly explain it to voters needing help. Pollworker training should include a component where pollworkers take turns demonstrating how to use the machine and answering questions.

Bringing Someone In the Booth to Help

Pollworkers should know that voters have the right to bring anyone of their choosing into the voting booth with them, except for their employer and their union representative. Information pertaining to this right should also be prominently displayed at polling locations.

Challenger Rights, Responsibilities and Limitations

It is likely that challengers will arrive at the polling place with very little training as to the rules and limitations guiding their behavior. While their intervention could ensure that someone is not inappropriately voting, intervention can also result in disruption and disenfranchisement. Pollworkers are ultimately responsible for imposing the State guidelines when necessary, and so must be instructed on challenger management.

Iowa State Pollworker Training

Iowa has 99 elections offices, one in each county. The smallest county has approximately 5,000 registered voters and 2.5 staff; the largest has 200,000 registered voters and approximately 40 staff. Each pollworker is required to receive at least 4 hours of training every 2 years. Before HAVA, the Secretary of State's office provided basic materials to the County Auditors, including approximately 15 pages of suggested training items, but each county was responsible for the content of its training. With limited resources, counties struggled to prepare and deliver their own pollworker training.

Training Design

Funding provided in HAVA gave the Secretary of State's office the opportunity to help counties with training. Iowa law now requires the Secretary of State to provide a training manual. The Secretary of State's office recruited a committee of eight individuals to develop a uniform, statewide pollworker training. The committee included county auditors, disability advocates, an individual pollworker and an adult education expert. The final work product, released in late 2004, was a uniform curriculum, a manual that could be easily tailored to the unique needs of individual counties and accompanying videos. The materials, however, were delivered too late to be used by many counties.

Current Program

Following the 2004 election, the material was split into two segments: one section was for the four hours of pollworker training required by law and the second part was for a voluntary certification program. The centerpiece of the 4-hour training was a uniform 40-page guidebook. The guidebook is divided by subject, e.g. "opening and closing the polls", "voting system-specific information", "provisional ballots, special situations." Several video files are part of the required school of instruction including "Voter in Need of Assistance, physical disability" and "Voter in Need of Assistance, Limited English Skills".³

Certification Beyond Required Training

The state also developed a voluntary precinct election certification program. This program took place over two 3-hour sessions. It is exclusively an in-person training, limited to 24 precinct election officials per county. The format is a combination of lecture, group activities, role-playing and hands-on use of the election equipment. Training topics include "working as a team", "customer service" and



“problem identification and solving”, subjects which are not required but which improve the Election Day experience for voters. And there is a test at the end to achieve certification.

Election officials view the voluntary certification as a way to enhance the basic, mandatory training and use HAVA money creatively. Iowa State University staff members are the trainers for this 6-hour program, and the trainees complete an evaluation. They estimate the cost of the program’s development is approximately \$115 per certified precinct worker, including pay and mileage.

They are currently testing an on-line program that will include a section demonstrating the voting equipment.

For additional information, contact Linda Langenberg, Deputy Secretary of State for Elections: 515-281-0145; LLangenberg@sos.state.ia.us.

Missouri Poll Worker Training

Missouri has 116 election authorities, one in each of its 114 counties, as well as the City of St Louis and Kansas City. Each election authority is required to train pollworkers and, prior to 2004, each authority developed its own training information. The quality varied widely. While a great deal of discretion was and continues to be with the individual election authorities, uniform pollworker training has now been developed. It is offered as an option to the election authorities.

Training Design

In 2002, the Secretary of State’s office recruited 8-10 people to serve as a “Pollworker Training Advisory Group.” Members included local election officials (urban, rural, Democratic and Republican) and representatives from the Governor’s Council on Disabilities and the Missouri Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities. This group then worked with faculty from three University of Missouri campuses, regional extension specialists, and the university’s media and support centers, to design and develop a pollworker training program. The University of Missouri Community Development Extension program, which specializes in adult training and outreach to the state’s residents, coordinated the effort.⁴ The group held monthly meetings, circulated and reviewed drafts, tested pilot materials, and conducted a post-project evaluation.

Current Program - Ready for 2004

The final 2004 product—developed in about one year—was a comprehensive state-wide training program for Missouri

poll workers, including a variety of materials that can be adapted to fit the different training timelines used by local election officials. It was designed incorporating adult learning principles and demonstrates ways to use various training tools and methods. The trainings are in modules, which provides flexibility to the elections authorities. Topics included:

- Polling Place Procedures and Accounting/Ballot Security;
- Provisional Voting;
- Voter Service: customer service, diversity sensitivity and civil rights of voters; and,
- Services to voters with disabilities and special needs.

Each module includes a short video and a role-play. In 2004, many of the counties, especially the smaller ones, used these materials. In the end, each election authority still determines its own training, but much of the material is provided to them.

The University of Missouri Community Development Extension Program began implementation of the project in 2004, using a “train-the-trainer” approach. It was offered as a four-hour training. The trainers could select which topics they felt best fit their audience and situation. In all, 237 people were trained to be trainers in nine locations across the state. Evaluations of the trainings are a critical component. More than 96% of the participants rated the training above average or outstanding, and at least 85% felt mostly or a great deal of comfort with all the topics for training. Ideally, pollworkers will attend an in-person, 2-hour training, with no more than 60 people per session. Workers who do not attend training sessions can access basic materials in through videos on DVD or on the Internet.

Training tools include:

- Trainers’ manual
- PowerPoint slides and transparency masters
- Videos and DVD’s
- Hands-on activities
- Pollworkers’ guide
- Interactive CD and Web site (potential for training for those unable to attend meeting, or reinforcement for those who did)

2006 Updates

Preparing for 2006, the Secretary of State contracted again with the University of Missouri Extension (at a cost



of \$126,000) to develop two additional modules: New Voting Machines, and Additional Situations for Voters with Complications. DVD's containing all materials from 2004 and 2006 were distributed to all election authorities, and authorities are free to make additional copies to distribute. Some elections officials used the new materials in 2006 training, including distribution of the DVD, and some did not. Approximately 80% of the poll workers who responded to a post-election survey indicated the new materials prepared them to function well or very well.

For additional information: Mary Simon Leuci, Assistant Dean and Program Director for Community Development, University of Missouri extension: leucim@missouri.edu.

North Carolina Poll Worker Training

North Carolina has 101 local elections offices, 1 in each of the 100 counties and 1 municipal election office. Pollworkers (precinct judges and assistants) are required to be trained before every election, and they receive a modest county-determined stipend to attend one and a half to two hour training. Through 2006, the substance of the training was developed by local election offices and varied greatly. Starting in 2007, all local elections offices are required to use the new statewide uniform pollworker training program. It was established using the supervisory authority of the State Board of Elections.

Training Design

The concept of statewide uniformity began incrementally, in 1993, with mandatory training of county election officials. All County election board directors must be certified, and staff may be certified as well. Certification is by the State Board of Elections in 13 areas of election law. Covered topics include equipment testing, provisional and absentee voting, audit and canvass procedures, recount procedures and checklist, security and chain of custody, polling place setup, election judge duties, accessibility and sensitivity, authorization to vote process, emergency and disaster planning, protests and challenges, and precinct management. In 1999, North Carolina developed its statewide voter registration database (SEIMS), which brought all of the counties to the same high level of technological sophistication with respect to voting lists and voter management. New, uniform voting equipment was installed in 2006.

For state election officials, pollworker training was the next logical focus for uniformity. North Carolina began discussions about statewide uniform pollworker training in March 2003, and it blossomed during discussions with two elections administration consultants in 2005. The State subsequently convened several focus groups and facilitated inclusive discussions with local elections officials and advocates. There was also one large symposium, followed by two statewide training sessions. Written materials and instructional DVD's and VHS tapes developed by staff from the North Carolina State Board of Elections with pro bono assistance from the North Carolina Community College System, will form the basis of the trainings.

Current Program - 2007: Three Training Venues for Pollworkers
Uniform Statewide Pollworker training will be available to pollworkers in 3 ways:

- **In person at the local boards of elections.** Counties will continue to offer training sessions, approximately 2 hours, with additional sessions as necessary. Staff from the NC State Board of Elections will be engaged in trainings of the county elections staff who will, in turn, be the trainers. Stipends will be provided to attendees. Distribution of instructional DVD's and VHS tapes will be included. There are statewide training seminars and special workshops as well. Other trainings of trainers will be offered as necessary, including several day training for multiple counties.
- **Community College Classes.** The State Board of Elections reached out to the North Carolina Community College System, which has agreed to offer a pollworker training class. It has not yet been determined whether it will be a single session or a multi-session class. Classes are free to senior citizens. The Community College system reaches all 100 counties.
- **Internet.** A vendor is being chosen for data storage and software for the interactive training, and the actual training is expected to be developed in-house. The initial on-line trainings will begin in the spring of '07, and the project should be completed in the summer of '07. It will be designed so that changes can easily be made. The first elections for which on-line pollworker training will be fully available are September, October and November '07.

For additional information, contact: Candi Rhinehart, Certification/Outreach Assistant, North Carolina State Board of Elections: candi.rhinehart@ncmail.net.



Wisconsin Poll Worker Training

Elections in Wisconsin are administered at the municipal level, and Wisconsin has 1851 municipalities within 72 counties. In the past, there was no requirement for pollworker training. Each clerk created whatever program the clerk needed. Payment to the pollworkers to attend any training was also determined at the local level.

Training Design

Following the November 2000 election and before the passage of HAVA, the legislature reached a consensus to require training for chief election inspectors, of which there is at least one per polling place. (There are approximately 2800 polling places statewide.) As a result, Wisconsin now requires 6 hours of training for chief election inspector. The baseline course is 3 hours. The training program began in 2004. The State solicited suggestions from the municipal clerks and then developed the baseline course – a written manual and a PowerPoint presentation. This is the foundation of the uniform statewide training.

Current Program

A team of State Elections Board specialists offers chief election inspector trainings at 16-18 sites throughout the state. Trainings are offered twice during the day, once during the day and once in the evening. They also offer some training of the trainers, and so train some municipal clerks who can then train chief elections inspectors in their own and neighboring municipalities. They are currently working on several website modules, in conjunction with the University of Wisconsin Extension. They hope the web-based modules enable trainees to view training materials on-demand and multiple times.

One part of the field training is Election Day preparation, which includes a review of Election Day forms and Election Day registration. This counts toward the 6 hours of required training.

Municipal clerks may also submit their training materials to the State Elections Board staff for review and approval to count towards the 6 hours of training.

2006 Updates

In 2006, the legislature passed a statute to require training of all election inspectors. The State Elections Board will develop the form and content, but the local clerks will be responsible for the training. While change doesn't come easily, there is significant support for the transition to uniform training for all election workers.

For additional information, contact: Diane Lowe, Lead Election Specialist, Wisconsin State Elections Board, (608) 266-8005.

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Endnotes

¹ See, for example, on-line videos available from Iowa: <http://www.sos.state.ia.us/elections/auditors/PollWkrTr.html>

² States should design their provisional voting procedures to include a voter registration application, permanently integrated as a mandatory part of the process, e.g. on the envelope or as part of the affidavit, within the paperwork of provisional voting. That way, if a person was not registered to vote at the time she voted provisionally, she will be registered for the next election.

³ The videos can be found at <http://www.sos.state.ia.us/elections/auditors/PollWkrTr.html>

⁴ The State developed a contract and Memorandum of Understanding with University Extension Service for their work on this project. The final cost was approximately \$670,000.